Informal meeting of the Heads of State and Government - Speech by Martin Schulz, President of the European Parliament

Ladies and gentlemen,

Today we discuss the fight against terrorism. Our feelings of shock that 17 people should have lost their lives in the attacks on Charlie Hebdo and on a kosher supermarket simply because of drawings which fanatics did not want to see in print, simply because as policemen they were protecting us, or simply because they were Jews, are still very raw.

I should like to address the following remarks to you, President Hollande, on behalf of the European Parliament. Your own behaviour at this difficult time, your government's measured response and, above all, the quiet, dignified protest which brought together millions of people on 11 January in Paris and throughout France, supported by the most senior representatives of the international community, indeed by almost all of us present here today, sent out a clear message – the French nation will not bow to terrorists. People are not prepared to give up our values of tolerance, respect and freedom of opinion out of fear of terrorism. Neither are they prepared to see those values and fundamental rights undermined in the name of the fight against terrorism.

Anti-terrorism measures

Ladies and gentlemen,

The onus is on us to protect people in Europe against terrorist attacks. The nature of the threat facing us has changed in recent years: terrorist organisations with clear command structures have given way to separate regional cells and now to individuals or small groups who plan and carry out their own terrorist attacks. Responding to this new type of threat means addressing major new challenges. In recent weeks we have held intensive discussions in the European Parliament. In all those discussions, whether in the political groups, in the committees, in the Conference of Presidents or in plenary, and in the resolution which we adopted yesterday by an overwhelming majority, one idea has repeatedly been expressed in forceful terms: we want to take a multidimensional approach to combating terrorism, based on three pillars: prevention, protection and prosecution.

First of all, prevention. We have to deal with a new phenomenon: young people radicalised and recruited via social media platforms. They are going off to fight in Syria and Iraq because here at home they feel that they have achieved nothing, that they have no future and that they do not belong. These are people who have been radicalised whilst living in our midst. We must do more to combat this phenomenon, address the root cause of the problem by fostering social inclusion, promoting integration, dialogue and tolerance, and working more closely with local communities. Moreover, we need to develop counter-narratives to online incitement to perform terrorist attacks. Radicalisation in prisons is a particularly grave concern and must receive specific attention.

Most of this work will certainly have to be done at local and national levels. But the EU must help, for example by better targeting funding and encouraging exchanges of best practices. I expect the Commission to examine how the EU can best support the Member States in this area and how the problem of radicalisation via the internet can be addressed.

Ladies and gentlemen,

We are categorically opposed to a curtailment of freedom of movement in the Schengen area. At the same time, however, we must clearly do more to strengthen controls at the external borders, and I

therefore encourage you to apply the existing rules more robustly. We must stop our nationals from travelling to war zones, joining terrorist groups such as the so-called Islamic State and fanning the conflicts raging in our neighbourhood. And the danger that these foreign fighters then return to Europe in order to carry out attacks is a very real one.

Mr. Tusk, you specifically raised the question of progress on the EU-PNR file. The European Parliament has heard your appeal. We are of course working constructively with the Council. Yesterday the Parliament committed to working towards the finalisation of EU-PNR by the end of this year. My colleague Timothy Kirkhope is working intensively with the other political groups and with the support of the Commission, on the draft report on EU-PNR, which seeks to amend the Commission proposal of 2011, and will be presented on the 26th of February.

As I am sure you will understand, I do not wish to anticipate the decision which the European Parliament will take on this issue. The only acceptable solution is one which both helps our law-enforcement authorities to assess accurately the nature of the threats facing us and at the same time is legally sound, proportionate and contains strong safeguards of fundamental rights.

We in the European Parliament think there is still much more to be done at EU level.

-We need to cut the sources of revenue of terrorists - in this sense, we have just agreed a reform of the EU Money Laundering Directive. Now governments must put these new rules into practice quickly.

-We need to prioritise the fight against the illegal trade in weapons.

-We must close loopholes in our criminal law - this means harmonising offences relating to foreign fighters and better coordinating the criminal law response through EUROJUST.

-We must conclude the reform of EUROPOL and most importantly I insist that the European Parliament expects clear progress on the Data Protection Package, including the Directive, which is currently blocked in the Council.

-We must use the Treaties to their full extent, including the Solidarity Clause and its binding obligation on you, the European Council, to regularly assess threats facing the Union.

We look forward to scrutinising the European Security Agenda which the Commission will be putting forward in April and which must evaluate whether different EU measures are working properly and what gaps remain to be closed.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Leading security experts repeatedly tell us that there are two problems hampering the fight against terrorism. Firstly, European intelligence services and security authorities still do not share information to a sufficient extent. A clear demonstration of your political will and your regular monitoring of progress is needed here to overcome reluctance at the technical level. Significant improvements could also be achieved by making more effective use of the Schengen Information System and by encouraging national authorities to work more closely with EUROPOL - through a dedicated platform - and EUROJUST. More effective networking, closer cooperation and more comprehensive exchanges of information can save lives.

Secondly, it is unfortunately still the case that the security forces and the courts do not always have the resources they need. Often the problem is not that we have too little information – without exception, all the perpetrators of attacks carried out in recent years were known to the authorities and were on watch lists – but that we fail to use the information at our disposal properly. We are in danger

of drowning in data and of losing the ability to interpret that data effectively. Analysing evidence is fundamental to the work of investigating crime, and we must take steps to ensure that the law-enforcement authorities can do their jobs properly.

The brutal murders of the Japanese journalist Kenji Goto and the Jordanian pilot Muaz al-Kasaesbeh have brought home to us once again that the so-called Islamic State represents a global threat. As long as this terrorist militia remains undefeated, it will continue to attract young people from Europe and elsewhere and enlist them in its violent struggle. The civil war in Syria is entering its fourth year. As long as that bloody conflict continues, the so-called Islamic State will become ever stronger, both militarily and ideologically, and will go on extending its geographical reach.

We note with satisfaction the intense activity of Ms Mogherini in the Foreign Affairs Council and the many detailed actions foreseen by it.

The EU must promote a global partnership against terrorism, working closely with the United Nations, with regional actors such as the African Union, the Gulf Cooperation Council, the Arab League and especially with countries neighbouring Syria and Iraq such as Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey.

Mediterranean Tragedy

Ladies and gentlemen,

We have learned with great shock and sorrow of yet another humanitarian disaster in the Mediterranean. On Monday the Italian Coast Guard attempted to rescue people who had left the coast of Libya on dinghies with no food and no water. 80 lives could be saved. But around 300 people are still missing.

Once more the European Union's glaring lack of a proper migration policy was made apparent.

We cannot leave people who flee their countries because of poverty or violence to the mercy of the sea. Every life lost is a stain on Europe.

The European Parliament calls urgently for a comprehensive EU migration policy and is working on a cross-party basis to achieve this - but we cannot do it alone.

Operation Triton may be European – which is certainly to be welcomed – but it pales in comparison with Mare Nostrum, the search and rescue effort previously deployed by the Italian authorities. We must urgently upgrade our search and rescue operations. I ask you: how much longer until we finally put an end to this ongoing human tragedy on our doorstep?

Deepening of the Economic and Monetary Union

Ladies and gentlemen,

If the crisis has taught us one thing: We can no longer conceive of the European economy as consisting of black boxes, of separate national economies - our economies are closely intertwined. What happens in one country affects other countries. As the challenge is European, our solution must be European.

Indeed, the crisis has laid bare the flaws in the design of Economic and Monetary Union. Those flaws at times have even been transformed into threats to the very existence of our common currency and the internal market. Acknowledging this truth also means accepting responsibility for endowing our Union with an institutional architecture which works, which is readily understandable and which is democratic.

In June 2012, you had called on the "Four Presidents" from the Commission, the European Council, the ECB and the Eurogroup to draw up by December 2012 "a specific and time-bound road map" specifying the process and the concrete steps, including measures requiring a Treaty change, towards the completion of a genuine EMU.

Since then, discussions have continued and some progress has been made, especially concerning the establishment of a banking union and the surveillance of country specific economic and social policies. These tools complement the single monetary policy for the euro; the surveillance of country specific economic and social policies and single market policies.

We welcome the fact that you now resume the debate on the deepening of the Economic and Monetary Union. However, in this regard, we continue to insist that the President of the European Parliament must be fully involved on an equal footing with the other institutions in the ongoing analysis and development of a roadmap. All other institutions are participating and it is a question of respect for the only directly elected European institution to be fully involved in the discussion about the future of the EMU. As we have been working on the relevant topics for years, we will certainly bring added value to the discussion.

Please allow me to mention five key points that are crucial for the European Parliament:

First Point: ensuring democratic accountability.

The European Parliament believes that we need closer economic coordination. But we will not accept more Europe if this means less parliamentarianism and less democracy.

The Parliament appeals to you: don’t venture any further down the slippery slope towards intergovernmentalism! Experience shows that the Community method is not only more democratic, it is also more effective. While unanimity makes it almost impossible to reach an agreement and intergovernmental treaties create cumbersome and lengthy ratification and implementation procedures, the Community method allows more qualitative and also quicker results, both in terms of decisions and implementation.

We also need to close the existing democratic deficit in the new economic governance framework. We therefore need stronger involvement of both the European Parliament and national parliaments. And we have put forward very concrete proposals on how to achieve this. We believe that the Commission should be able to present the Country Specific Recommendations in the national parliaments before their adoption by the Council. Also, the ESM should be made accountable to the European Parliament. And key decisions, such as the granting of financial assistance to a Member State and the conclusion of memorandums, should be subject to proper scrutiny by the European Parliament.

Second point: enhancing the coordination of economic policies.

To ensure a much-needed better coordination between countries, we have to look at the overall balance and consider the policy mix from a European perspective. This is especially important, if we want to increase synergies and coherence.

Also we should work towards integrating more fiscal and economic policies and increasing the level of implementation of the Country Specific Recommendations. Today, the implementation rate is unfortunately still very low. For the economic and monetary union to function it is essential for Member States to make EU-level commitments their commitments. We understand that sometimes

there is good will but practical problems are encountered with implementation. Therefore, we want to have Country Specific Recommendations formulated so as to provide the policy space Member States need. Both for designing measures and for specific reforms that will allow for the implementation of the recommendation.

Third Point: strengthening the social dimension.

The European Parliament has been calling for a strong social pillar within the EMU for quite some time. For many decades the European Union was a promise of peace, democracy and prosperity. We want the EU to become this promise again by achieving its objectives of high levels of employment and social protection. We should pay just as much attention to employment and social indicators as we do to budgetary and macroeconomic indicators. This would amount to nothing more than annual monitoring to determine whether Member States are honouring the undertakings given as part of the Europe 2020 Strategy.

In the Thyssen report, the European Parliament has called for a Social Pact for Europe. We want wages that enable people to live in dignity, high-quality public services, access to affordable housing and a programme of social housing construction, guaranteed universal access to basic health care, protection of social and employment rights, equal pay and equal rights for equal work and jobs for young people.

These are issues which ordinary people in Europe care about! And we will continue to fight for the incorporation of a social dimension in the EMU in the interests of ordinary Europeans.

Fourth point: using the existing Treaties instead of focusing the debate on treaty change.

From the outset the European Parliament has warned of the dangers of Treaty change. On several occasions I have voiced our real fear that the debates on Treaty amendments and constitutional conventions, however important they may be, will blind us to the fact that we must use the provisions of the existing Treaties to overcome the current crisis.

Almost all the changes required for a deepening of the EMU could be made on the basis of the existing Treaties, as the Commission has already outlined in detail in its blueprint. It comes as a great relief to us, that more and more among you are abandoning the idea of treaty change.

Fifth point: safeguarding the unity of the union.

Strengthening the Economic and Monetary Union cannot come at the price of splitting the EU. All EU Member States must be able to participate in the closer coordination of economic policy on a voluntary basis. There is no need whatsoever to create new, parallel Unions and new, parallel institutions. In the context of Eurozone governance as well, the integrity of the Community institutions must be safeguarded. It is an over-reaction to seek to split the EU simply because two countries have opted out of the currency union. Given that all the other EU Member States are bound by the Treaty to introduce the euro, we would be well advised to implement reforms which enable the 25 Member States that are keen to take part in all EU policies to do just that.

Ladies and gentlemen,

To sum up, the European Parliament hopes you will not continue with the 'quick-fix' method, carrying out makeshift repairs whenever cracks appear in the European integration process and sometimes resorting to Frankenstein constructions outside the Treaties, such as the Fiscal Pact or the 'contractual arrangements'. You now have an opportunity - and this is the choice facing you - to sort out this

institutional mess at long last and strengthen European democracy. Only a Europe that is democratic and delivers on jobs and growth will re-gain the trust of the people.

Ukraine

Ladies and gentlemen,

Please allow me to first thank Chancellor Merkel and President Hollande for their initiative to bring Russian and Ukrainian leaders back to the negotiation table. You had a long night in Minsk with difficult negotiations and a lot at stake.We are all truly relieved that a common position could be reached in the end. We are not enthusiastic, but relieved that a cease fire was agreed upon and the agreement reached in Minsk last September was confirmed. Now we have a clear timetable for the implementation of the Minsk agreement with regards to elections, border controls, and the exchange of prisoners among other points. We hope that this morning's agreement will be a first step to stop the escalation.

We expect all sides to respect the cease fire and refrain from any actions which could endanger the coming into force of the cease fire.

In this situation, the European Union has a key role to play. It must maintain its unity at all costs and be ready to support Ukraine along the road. Ordinary Ukrainians took to the streets to demonstrate in favour of European-style democracy in their country. They are looking to their government to implement major changes – rightly so. Our message to the government in Kyiv remains unchanged: the rule of law, zero tolerance for corruption and political and economic reforms are essential. A reformed, properly functioning Ukraine is the best response to aggression. We will continue to provide support in the form of assistance and expertise. I urge you to consider financial and economic support for Ukraine that will help stabilize the country

The European Parliament will play its part in helping the newly-elected Verkhovna Rada to make progress along the path of reform. I am looking forward to meeting its President, Volodymyr Groysman, at the end of this month. At that meeting we will launch our programme of support for parliamentary capacity-building in Ukraine.

We must continue to do everything in our power to ensure that there is no return to military confrontation. Our aim must be a diplomatic solution and this morning's news from Minsk gives us a fragile, but a very important hope that peace is still possible. That we have so far resisted all attempts to divide us is an exploit and success in itself. We can't allow anyone to divide us - Only a united Europe is a strong Europe.

Thank you for your attention.